



# PHIN CoPs Resource Kit

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# Welcome to the PHIN Communities of Practice Resource Kit!

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are working to strengthen the Public Health Information Network (PHIN) as members collaborate, share, and focus on issues prioritized by the PHIN Community. The PHIN Community provides a participatory environment for members to learn, share expertise, and develop solutions to improve public health's capacity to electronically use and exchange information.

The PHIN CoPs Resource Kit is a repository of resources and techniques for CoPs. PHIN CoPs can use this kit either for assistance with the startup of new communities or for growing and sustaining those that already exist.

The PHIN Communities of Practice Program (CoPP), in their role of supporting the PHIN Community, developed this Resource Kit to provide PHIN members and interested parties with information about CoPs and their functioning within the PHIN Community. The Resource Kit offers a program overview, templates, and guides that can be used to develop a new community or enhance an existing community. Within this Kit, you will find guidance for all stages of CoP development—from planning to evaluation!

The PHIN CoP Resource Kit will grow and expand with the PHIN CoPs to address changing needs. Your feedback will help improve this Resource Kit by identifying needed resources and suggesting areas for enhancement. Please send your feedback by using the [online form](#) or via e-mail to [phin@cdc.gov](mailto:phin@cdc.gov).

The PHIN CoP Resource Kit contains the following sections:

- [Introduction to Communities of Practice](#)—Learn about the theory behind CoPs, the CoP approach, benefits of joining a CoP, roles and responsibilities within a CoP, and success stories from current communities.
- [Overview of PHIN Communities of Practice](#)—Read an explanation of the PHIN CoP structure, including the PHIN Community, PHIN CoPs, PHIN CoPs Council, and the PHIN CoP Program.
- [Aligning with PHIN](#)—Determine how your CoP can align with the PHIN Community.
- [Launch and Sustain a Community of Practice](#)—Learn how to plan, launch, sustain, and evolve a CoP.
- [Evaluate](#)—Read about the importance of evaluation, the PHIN evaluation approach and how to successfully conduct an evaluation for your CoP.
- [Glossary](#)—Discover explanations of terms related to CoPs and the terminology specific to the PHIN Community.
- [References](#)—Review the sources used to develop this Resource Kit as well as a collection of other books, Web sites, and information related to CoPs.
- [Resources](#)—Explore resources, such as templates, guides, and examples of documents commonly used by new and existing CoPs. Each template is downloadable and allows you to modify as necessary.

## Just Remember....

**Call-out boxes** are included throughout the resource kit as a reminder of key ideas to keep in mind. These “lessons learned” are collected from literature and the experiences of people involved with successful communities of practice.

## Where Should You Begin?

If you are not sure where to begin and have specific questions, please review the following to determine which section of the Resource Kit to visit.

### Join a CoP

If you want to learn about PHIN Communities of Practice and are interested in getting involved, you can do that easily!

- To find out what a CoP is, check out the [Introduction to Communities of Practice](#) section.
- To learn about the PHIN CoPs browse through the [Overview of PHIN Communities of Practice](#).
- To jump right in and sign up for a CoP, complete the [Join a CoP](#) form.

### Start a CoP

Do you have an idea for a new PHIN CoP? Visit the following sections to learn how to plan and launch a community.

- To **gain knowledge of CoPs**, check out the [Introduction to Communities of Practice](#) section.
- To **learn about the PHIN Community**, read the [Overview of PHIN Communities of Practice](#) section.
- To **begin laying the groundwork for a CoP**, visit the [Launch and Sustain a Community of Practice – Plan](#) section.
- To **kickoff your CoP**, head to [Launch and Sustain a Community of Practice – Launch](#) section.

### Align your CoP with PHIN

Are you currently a member of an informal group, user group, or interest group that is working on a technical or functional area key to PHIN? If so, do you want to advance your group towards more collaborative work, innovation, and educational opportunities? Are you interested in expanding your work across the larger public health informatics community? Your group can join the PHIN Community to work along side and with other communities on PHIN-related issues.

- To learn about **PHIN CoPs**, the [Overview of PHIN Communities of Practice](#) section is an excellent place to begin.
- To obtain more information about **the benefits of becoming a PHIN CoP**, see [Aligning with PHIN](#) section.

### Launch and Sustain your CoP

If your PHIN CoP is already in place and you would like ideas on how to sustain and evolve your community, this is the area for you!

- To **learn about encouraging participation**, check out the [Launch and Sustain a Community of Practice – Sustain and Evolve](#) section.

### Evaluate your CoP

Learn how to use evaluation measures to help assess how effectively your CoP is working and to determine its impact on your community members, your organization, and the domain.

- To **evaluate the progress of your CoP**, see the [Evaluate](#) section.

# Introduction to Communities of Practice

A community of practice (CoP) is defined as “a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis.” (Wenger) The three distinct elements that compose a CoP are a *community* that enables interaction (such as discussions, collaborative activities, and relationship building), a shared *domain* of interest (such as Vocabulary Standards or Outbreak Management), and a shared *practice* of experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems. This approach is enabling the PHIN Community to grow and mature while focusing on efforts in sharing knowledge and problem solving.

Although not formally termed “communities of practice,” CoPs exist across disciplines and in many domains of your personal and professional world. You may already be a member of a CoP through a professional affiliation, by geographical community ties, or in an educational endeavor. Your level of involvement in a community is up to you; you may be an occasional participant in some and a leader or core member in others. For instance, many departments of education build CoPs around domains such as curricula and teacher best practices. Medical practices form CoPs around innovations in delivery of care or maximizing existing resources. An example of an informal, unnamed CoP is a residential homeowner's association.

“CoPs embody a store of knowledge... CoPs knit people together with peers (e.g., CDC informatics specialist, state and local public health partners, nationally recognized thought leaders, IT specialists). They represent colleagues committed to jointly developing better practices through focused collaboration and solution building.... Outputs can include leading practices, guidelines, knowledge repositories, technical problem and solution discussions, working papers, and strategy.”

Nicole Fehrenbach,  
NCPHI, 2008

## CoP Approach

The concept of learning through CoPs is presented and developed by Etienne Wenger in his book *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (1998).<sup>3</sup> According to Wenger, CoPs use communal learning, expertise, and knowledge to achieve shared goals. CoPs are not a new concept. Although largely unnamed and unrecognized as such, people have always gathered in groups to discuss ways to learn, improve, or address issues, problems, or situations.

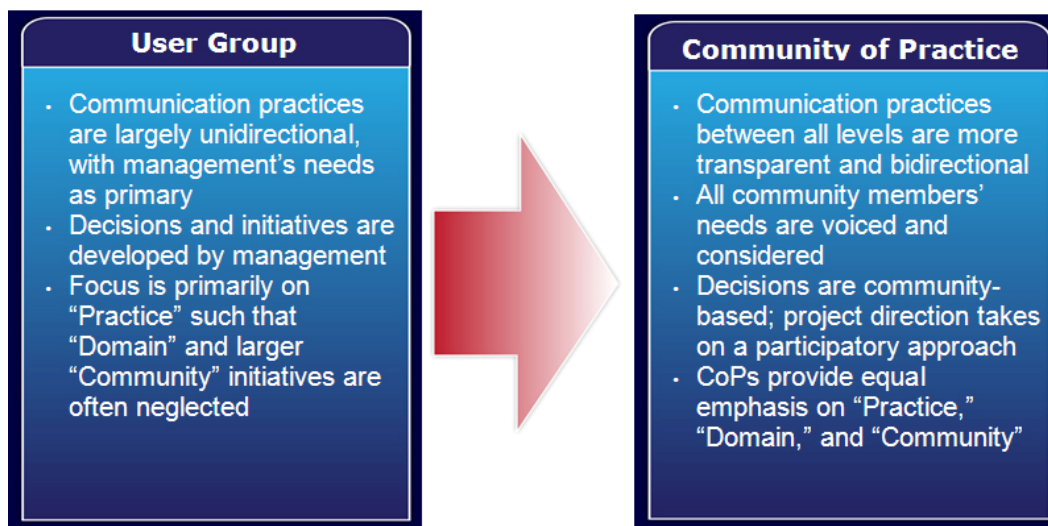
According to Wenger, CoPs must have the following three crucial elements:

1. **Domain** — the shared interest that provides the incentive and passion for the group to come together. Because CoPs are autonomous, the scope of the domain is agreed upon by the CoP members, thus ensuring that the group focuses on what is important to the community.
2. **Community** — the group of people who come together with a common interest, who share their perspectives and knowledge with one another. The community fosters a sense of belonging and collaboration.
3. **Practice** — the agreed upon ways of formalizing and implementing the collectively developed knowledge and solutions that further the community's mission. This includes developing and implementing new technology or best practices, innovation and problem solving, conducting research, and developing standards.



CoPs are autonomous, self-organizing, and operate with varying degrees of formality; they focus on a domain, which is defined collaboratively and reflect the interests of the group. Members may enter and leave a CoP at any time, and CoPs remain active as long as the members benefit from participation and there is a need for a CoP in the domain.

There is often a lack of understanding around the distinctions between a CoP and other similar groups. A CoP is not simply a network of people who have a common interest. Nor is a CoP a group of people whose focus on the use of a common tool, as this more commonly defines a user group. CoPs grow organically with a specific purpose in mind, whereas a user group typically works toward a common assigned goal and a certain level of participation is largely required. The defining characteristic of CoPs is that members have a *shared practice* and are *mutually engaged* with one another in that practice.<sup>4</sup> CoPs are more participatory, focus on all members' needs, and make community-based decisions. The following illustration shows how CoPs go a step further than a user group.



## Benefits of a CoP

Members, organizations, and the public health community can benefit from working together in a CoP. Below are some of the benefits to each group:

Members	Organizations	Public Health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continual learning / professional development</li> <li>Access to expertise</li> <li>Improved communication with peers</li> <li>Increased productivity and quality of work</li> <li>Network for keeping current in field</li> <li>Sense of professional identity</li> <li>Enhanced professional reputation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced time / cost to retrieve information</li> <li>Reduced learning curves</li> <li>Knowledge sharing and distribution</li> <li>Coordination, standardization, and synergies across organizational units</li> <li>Reduced rework and reinvention</li> <li>Innovation</li> <li>Benchmarking against industry standards</li> <li>Alliance building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent communication and reporting</li> <li>Improved analytic capability</li> <li>Promotion of standards</li> <li>Support and promotion of key national initiatives</li> <li>Advancement of domain-specific capabilities</li> <li>Link geographically dispersed practitioners</li> <li>Increased government efficiency</li> </ul>

Adapted from: Etienne Wenger. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.1998.

## Responsibilities within CoPs

Although CoP membership is voluntary and CoPs function based on community input, there are several leadership responsibilities necessary for a CoP to be successful. Two primary roles should be filled at the initial kickoff of a community: the Community Leader and the Community Sponsor. The **Community Leader** guides the community and helps keep the focus on the goals, while the **Community Sponsor** serves as the group's champion, internally and externally.

Other responsibilities, listed below, are also important to a CoP's success.

- **Knowledge Management** — managing the CoP's repository of information, ensuring all members have access to information created or referenced by the community.
- **Meeting Facilitation** — ensuring meetings stay on track, that each member has an opportunity to speak, and that the group is working towards meeting the goals of the community.
- **Relationship Management** — building relationships between the CoP's members to strengthen the group's membership.
- **Subject Matter Expertise** — conducting research and providing expertise to ensure the group doesn't get stalled or stray from its focus and that the community continues to seek out new and innovative solutions.
- **Technology Management** — selecting, managing, and maintaining the right technology to ensure members, regardless of geographical location, have the opportunity to interact, participate, and benefit from the community.

These responsibilities do not have to be managed by single individuals. One or more members may be accountable for multiple responsibilities, which is likely in the early stages of community development. For more details about how to select members to fill these roles, refer to the [Launch and Sustain a Community of Practice](#) section.



## Examples of Communities of Practice

CoPs exist in all aspects of society and have enabled many advances and innovations across a wide variety of fields. For example, the Federal Highway Administration's Highway Community Exchange CoP is largely responsible for many innovations that make our roads safer, like rumble strips and standards for warning.<sup>8</sup>



The Safe Cities CoP is another example of a CoP that benefits society through innovation. This CoP's goal is to make cities safer through focusing on reducing gun violence, preventing youth violence, decreasing crime rates, and fighting drug and alcohol abuse.<sup>8</sup>

Two examples of CoPs sponsored by the National Center for Public Health and Informatics (NCPHI), CDC are described in the following tables.

Public Health Vocabulary	
Date of Inception	December, 2005
Number of Members	300
Domain / Goal / Objective	Promotes the use of standard vocabulary to aid in the electronic exchange of data. Provides education about vocabulary standards and helps state and local partners attain compliance with the PHIN standards for vocabulary.
PHIN CoP	Yes
Quotes	"We needed to break down the silos of vocabulary development and usage within CDC and across public health-- the Vocabulary CoP has allowed us to begin to do that." —PHVCoP Lead
Tips/Tricks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss challenges faced by PHIN and state/local public health.</li> <li>• Connect geographically dispersed people by teleconference to ensure all members feel included.</li> <li>• Use a collaboration tool and other dissemination methods to publicize events, distribute information, and post documentation to ensure everyone is on the same page.</li> <li>• Engage and encourage early participation from Subject Matter Experts to help create practical knowledge products.</li> </ul>

Project Management	
Date of Inception	July, 2006
Number of Members	400
Domain /Goal / Objective	Internally-focused CoP formed to advance the discipline of project management and develop a single methodology for project management that will work across all CDC. Works toward helping members attain PMI certification and focuses on the process of project management.
PHIN CoP	No
Quotes	"This CoP is like a channel for information about the industry." —PM CoP Lead  "CoP meetings are about food, fun, education, and networking." —PM CoP Lead  "It's important for us to educate new members on what a CoP is and what they have to contribute." —PM CoP Lead
Tips/Tricks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with a core group to develop the charter, then expand</li> <li>• Conduct monthly meetings and have an educational component</li> <li>• Recognize and engage new members at each meeting</li> <li>• Educate members on what a CoP is and expect them to contribute</li> </ul>



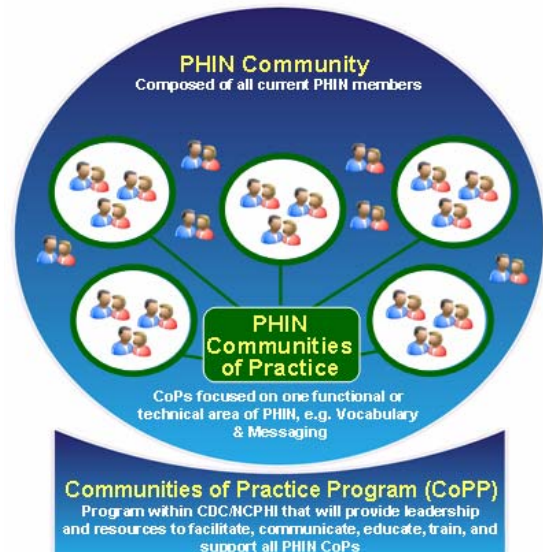
# Overview of the PHIN Communities of Practice

## PHIN Community

The Public Health Information Network (PHIN) strives to improve public health use and exchange of information by promoting the use of standards and technical requirements. The PHIN Community is comprised of individuals with the interest and passion to work toward improving PHIN. The Community strives to provide an equitable, participatory environment for PHIN members to learn, share expertise, and collaboratively develop solutions to improve the public health's information exchange capacity.

Responsibilities of the PHIN Community include

- Strengthening the PHIN social network;
- Suggesting, developing, and supporting PHIN CoPs;
- Encouraging the adoption of standards for interoperability; and,
- Working to develop and accomplish goals and objectives in support of PHIN.



## PHIN CoPs

The PHIN Community supports a collection of CoPs that focus on specific functional and technical areas key to PHIN. These groups, called PHIN Communities of Practice, are comprised of members with interests and passions for working toward the development of new technology and best practices specific to a particular domain. Within a PHIN CoP, members learn, share, and collaborate to address a specific issue and/or project within the domain. Examples of PHIN CoPs in existence or in the process of being established include Vocabulary and Messaging, Outbreak Management, and Enterprise Architecture.

Responsibilities of the PHIN CoPs include

- Representing a functional or technical area key to PHIN (not an application);
- Working on issues and solutions that the PHIN CoPs Council (described below) has identified as priorities;
- Following the governance principles: participation, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and rules of behavior; and,
- Evaluating the success of the CoP and participating in an overall PHIN Community evaluation on an annual basis.

PHIN CoPs are encouraged to meet as frequently as necessary to fulfill these responsibilities. Attendance in person is preferred, with distant CoP members participating by teleconferencing or web conferencing.

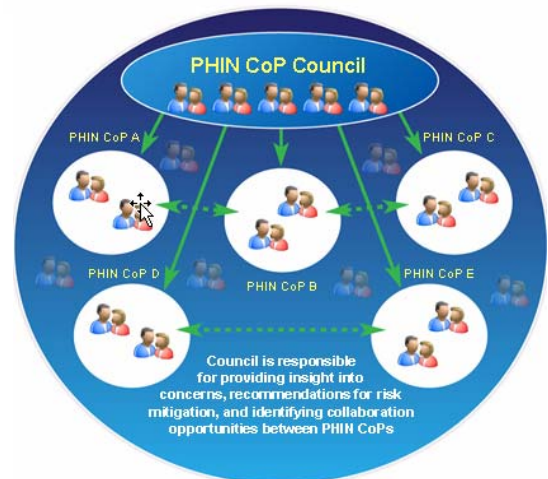
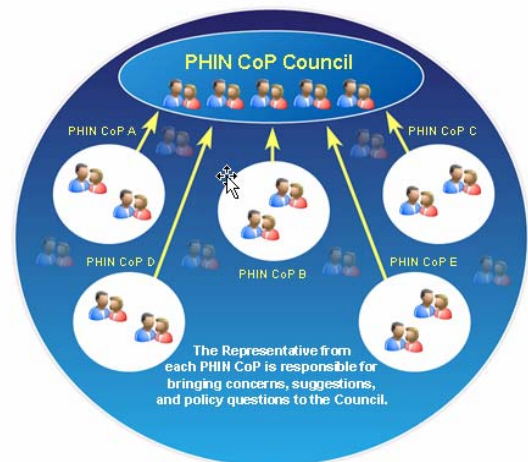
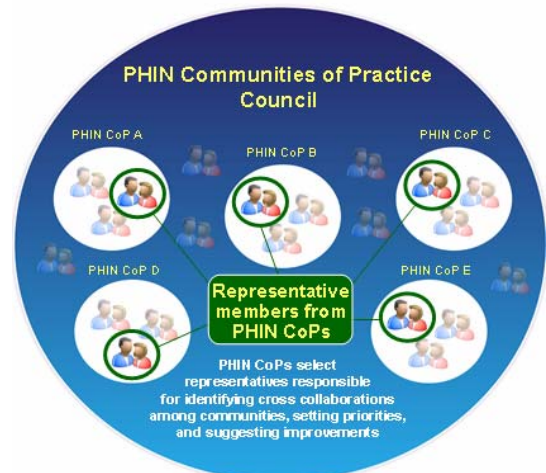
## PHIN Communities of Practice Council

The PHIN Communities of Practice Council (CoPC) functions in an advisory and guidance capacity. The key to maintaining a successful community is an appropriate leadership infrastructure to guide, support, and renew the community initiative over time.<sup>7</sup> The Council is responsible for identifying cross collaborations among communities, setting priorities and suggesting CoP programmatic improvements to further enhance the PHIN Community. The guidance and assistance provided by the CoPC will maximize the potential of the PHIN CoPs and the PHIN Community to strengthen PHIN.

The CoPC is comprised of representatives from each of the PHIN CoPs, as illustrated in the graphics to the right. Information flow from the Council to the PHIN Community and the PHIN CoPs is bidirectional. Representatives must be excellent listeners and presenters, as they are responsible for sharing concerns, offering suggestions and addressing policy questions with the Council. The Council provides insight into concerns, recommends risk mitigation strategies, and suggests collaborations between existing PHIN CoPs.

Responsibilities of the PHIN CoPC include

- Monitoring the progress of the PHIN Community and PHIN CoPs;
- Reporting concerns and proposing solutions to the appropriate CoP and CoP Program (CoPP);
- Synthesizing processes and outcomes, and recommending new approaches;
- Identifying opportunities for cross collaboration between PHIN CoPs; and,
- Identifying new goals and objectives for consideration by appropriate PHIN CoPs.



## PHIN Communities of Practice Program

The Communities of Practice Program (CoPP) is comprised of a team of people supported by CDC who are knowledgeable and trained in the areas of CoP methodology, communication, education, collaboration technology, and evaluation. The team supports and guides the PHIN Community and all PHIN CoPs by providing facilitation, oversight, and reporting on activities of the PHIN Community and PHIN CoPs.

Responsibilities of the CoPP include

- Supporting each PHIN CoP with facilitation, consultation, education, and communication and collaboration tools (e.g., webinars, teleconferences);
- Reviewing operational concerns and suggestions with the PHIN CoPC;
- Supporting the planning, launch, and development of new PHIN CoPs;
- Developing and maintaining this PHIN CoP Resource Kit;
- Supporting PHIN CoP Governance; and,
- Leading and coordinating evaluations for the PHIN Community and CoPs.

## PHIN Components – Responsibilities at a Glance

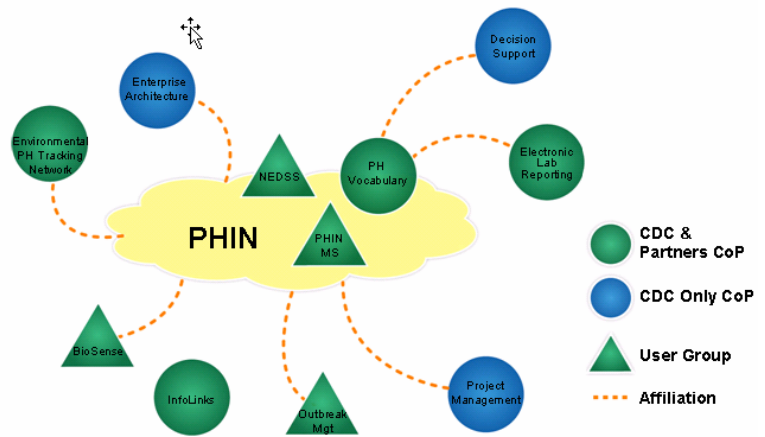
The following provides an overview of the responsibilities for each component discussed in the above sections.

PHIN Community & Domain CoPs	PHIN CoPC	CoPP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify goals and objectives that support PHIN</li><li>• Work to accomplish goals and objectives in a timely manner</li><li>• Strengthen PHIN Social network</li><li>• Bring concerns / issues / questions to CoPC</li><li>• Attend roundtable meetings with CoPP</li><li>• Identify opportunities for cross collaboration among CoPs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify and prioritize goals and objectives for PHIN CoPs</li><li>• Identify opportunities for cross collaboration among PHIN CoPs</li><li>• Monitor progress of PHIN Community and CoPs</li><li>• Report concerns / solutions to CoPs and CoPP</li><li>• Compile progress reports for CoPP</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support PHIN CoPs with facilitation, consultation, education, and collaboration capability</li><li>• Review operational concerns / suggestions with PHIN CoPC</li><li>• Support planning / launch of new PHIN CoPs</li><li>• Maintain the Resource Kit</li><li>• Support Governance</li><li>• Monitor activities / progress of PHIN CoPs; report to NCHPI leadership</li><li>• Ensure PHIN Community and CoPs participate in evaluation activities</li><li>• Schedule roundtable meetings with CoPs</li></ul>

## Aligning with PHIN

### Are You a CoP Member?

Are you currently part of an informal group, a user group, or an interest group working on technical and/or functional areas related to PHIN? If so, why not advance your group toward broader educational opportunities, innovation, and collaborative work? PHIN focuses on enhancing research and best practices related to efficient, effective, and interoperable public health information systems. To determine if your group is functioning as a Community of Practice, please refer to the Resources Section and take the [“You Might Be A CoP If...”](#) quiz.



**The Current State of PHIN** consists of disparate communities and user groups with few connections to each other or in support of PHIN.

The graphic above displays the current CDC and CDC / Partner CoPs and user groups. The goals, as displayed in the graphic below, are to support CoPs to align or more closely align with PHIN, to transition some existing user groups, key to PHIN, into CoPs, and to create new CoPs needed to fill functional and technical gaps in PHIN.



**The Future State of PHIN** is an organized constellation of communities working in partnership to strengthen PHIN.

### Align Your CoP with PHIN

Participation in the PHIN Community fosters collaboration and dramatically expands the resources available to your CoP, encourages knowledge sharing, and fosters continued learning and personal growth. CoPs that join the PHIN Community benefit from advances in the development and use of standards, best practices, and technical innovations within their own CoP as they work within the PHIN framework to advance the mission of PHIN. Opportunities for participation include webinars, face-to-face meetings, and interactions with other PHIN Communities of Practice.

A PHIN CoP becomes successful within the PHIN Community by creating open relationships with other PHIN CoPs and contributing meaningfully in the areas of knowledge sharing, technical solutions, and best practices. Fundamental characteristics of an effectively aligned CoP include co-learning,

participatory relationships, joint processes by which all members have the opportunity to contribute equally, member empowerment, and collaborative systems development.<sup>5</sup>

There are multiple benefits a CoP can realize by aligning with PHIN. Some of the key benefits include

- Reduced duplication of effort and conflicting initiatives;



- Support to meet PHIN requirements and certification
- Access to best practices and lessons learned across the PHIN Community;
- Contact with Subject Matter Experts in related domains;
- Reduced time/cost to retrieve information and shorter learning curves; and,
- Expanded awareness of current public health informatics issues.

Once a Community chooses to align with PHIN, the new PHIN CoP will be responsible for

- Working within a functional/technical area key to PHIN;
- Working broadly across the domain to consider the development and use of multiple tools and processes;
- Focusing on issues and seek solutions that PHIN CoPC identifies as priorities;
- Welcoming individuals interested in joining the community;
- Evaluating progress of the CoP and participating in ongoing evaluation of the PHIN Community; and,
- Following governance principles (listed below).
  1. **Participation:** Direct involvement or through legitimate representatives in the CoP.
  2. **Transparency:** Decisions made and decision enforced in a manner that follows rules of community behavior; information is freely available and directly accessible to those who are affected by such decisions and decision enforcement.
  3. **Responsiveness:** Attempt to serve stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.
  4. **Consensus Orientation:** Endeavor to attain unanimity or broad Community agreement on Community decisions and implementation of these decisions.
  5. **Equity and Inclusiveness:** Ensure members of the Community feel valued and included.
  6. **Effectiveness and Efficiency:** Ensure Communities produce results that meet the needs of the community while making the best use of resources; sustain use of community resources and protect the community environment.
  7. **Accountability:** Maintain responsibility and remain answerable to all PHIN stakeholders.
  8. **Rules of Behavior:** Follow prescribed guidelines for conduct, and ensure actions are fair and enforced impartially.



If your Community of Practice would like to align with PHIN and join the PHIN Community, please send an email to the PHIN Communities of Practice Program at [phin@cdc.gov](mailto:phin@cdc.gov).

A PHIN Communities of Practice Governance document is in development by the PHIN CoPC. Upon finalization, the document can be found here: <http://www.cdc.gov/phin/communities>

# Launch and Sustain a Community of Practice

This section of the Resource Kit discusses the process used to launch a new community of practice and provides guidance for ensuring your community maintains productive momentum. If you are a member of a CoP but do not know the current stage of your Community, please refer to the Resources Section of the Resource Kit and complete the [“In What Phase is my CoP?”](#) quiz.

## Get Started

If you have an idea for a PHIN-related CoP, it is important to determine if this community is already in existence. The CoP Community may exist in another format such as an informal working group, technical club, recurring lunch meeting, or message board community. If you are able to find a group of people already acting as a CoP in your domain, you may decide to suggest the group consider aligning with PHIN to gain access to the resources and support system offered currently offered the Community. Please refer to the [Aligning with PHIN](#) section of the Resource Kit and learn how your community can align with PHIN.

Once you have determined that your domain of interest does not already exist in the form of a CoP, there are steps you can follow to develop and grow your Community. These steps include [Plan](#), [Launch](#), and [Sustain and Evolve](#).

## Plan

### Get Focused

As stated in the Introduction to CoPs section of the Resource Kit, each Community of Practice consists of three primary characteristics: a domain, a related community, and a common practice. To identify a potential CoP, it may be helpful to brainstorm functional and technical areas that are not covered by an existing PHIN CoP—or perhaps there is a particular niche already covered by a PHIN Community of Practice that deserves a greater focus. Topics best suited to a CoP connect a wide range of people who

otherwise would not have the opportunity to interact or have an available channel to share best practices, discuss common problems, and collaboratively create solutions. It may be helpful to identify topics that are currently the subject of a particularly vexing problem or are widely debated. Keep in mind that the topic needs to be interesting to a number of other people, and should relate to PHIN.

Once you have an idea for a domain CoP, you will need to identify three to five potential members and ask several questions to identify topics of interest, possible issues, and potential leaders. Please refer to the [“Could it be a CoP”](#) worksheet, located in the Resources Section, for ideas and these questions.

After discussing and agreeing upon the CoP idea with others in your domain, collectively meet and begin drafting a charter. While you can expect the charter to evolve once the CoP has been launched, coming together to begin to establish the CoP mission, scope, goals, and objectives will aid in ensuring all prospective members understand the future direction of the Community. As potential members will guide the direction of the CoP over time, it is important not to

### Just Remember....

**Gaining Focus is about Converging**, not laying concrete. While the lack of a salient vision or clearly defined goals can certainly lead to trouble, it is also important to keep things moving at an adequate pace. As you are forming a CoP, discover strategic objectives and come together with other community leaders to steward the community as it matures.

*“Planning a community is more a matter of finding the triggers to catalyze evolution than creating a full design. The overall goal in the planning stage is to promote community development around each of the three key elements – domain, community and practice – by defining the community’s focus, identifying and building relationships between members, and identifying topics and projects that would be exciting for community members.”<sup>1</sup>*

over-strategize or limit the potential growth of the community when first creating the charter.<sup>6</sup> For suggestions about what to include in the charter, please refer to the [“CoP Charter Template”](#), located in the Resources Section.

Within your charter, you may want to document community expectations (rules of behavior) that present guidelines for participation in the CoP. These guidelines will describe the basic principles of the Community’s culture, such as a commitment to a collaborative approach, processes around confidentiality and privacy, and the technological infrastructure that will initially support the community. For more information on creating community expectations, please refer to the document located on the Resources Section entitled [“Community Expectations”](#).

Once you have decided to form a CoP and drafted the charter, it is time to select leaders, choose collaboration resources, and develop collaboration guidelines.

### How to Identify Leaders in Your CoP

According to Etienne Wenger, a key feature of successful CoPs is a “skillful and reputable coordinator.”<sup>1</sup> Since CoP membership and leadership is voluntary, it is beneficial to divide responsibilities among members to reduce the workload of any one individual.

There are two primary roles that need to be filled at the time of CoP Initiation: Community Leader and Community Sponsor.

- **Community Leader: Guides the Community’s Purpose and Strategic Intent**—A Community Leader likely “owns” the charter of the group. He or she may have ideas about what the goals of the group should be, how to reach them, and effectively engages others to collectively chart the CoPs’ course. This person helps the group stay focused on its particular domain and helps provide solutions for issues that may arise.
- **Community Sponsor: Champions the Community Internally and Externally** — This person likely has close relationships with leaders in the domain and related communities. He or she is highly motivated to ensure that the community succeeds and encourages member participation. This person champions the community’s successes and advocates for the community’s needs. The sponsor legitimizes the CoP and may also provide perspectives and resources, periodically review progress and developmental needs, and build collaborative relationships with officials or sponsors from other agencies.<sup>7,8</sup> Refer to the [“Request an Executive Sponsor”](#), located in the Resources Section as a guide on how to engage a sponsor and communicate his or her responsibilities.

Other responsibilities (listed below) also need to be addressed as a Community of Practice launches. Each responsibility need not belong to a single individual; rather, responsibilities should be divided among several individuals.

- **Council Representation**—Each community needs representation in the CoPC to ensure the Community has an equal voice and is informed of PHIN Community activities.
- **Knowledge Management**—Over time, the CoP will likely develop a large repository of information. While this task may be small at first, it will grow in size with increasingly responsibility for organizing and posting community documents (charter, agendas, meeting minutes, etc.) to a common repository and helping to shape the information into knowledge.

### Just Remember....

**Strong Leadership is essential** in the start-up of any new CoP. In the beginning, two key roles should be filled: the Sponsor and the Leader. A strong sponsor is needed to support the vision and the process of the community and champion the community internally and externally. A key leader nurtures the community from infancy and tackles the initial challenges, logistical and otherwise, that the group may face.

*“The key to successful communities of practice is an appropriate leadership infrastructure that guides, supports and renews the community initiative over time. In every case we are familiar with, leadership is the most critical success factor for community participation and effectiveness.”<sup>1</sup>*



- **Meeting Facilitation**—To ensure each member has a chance to speak, that meetings stay on track, and meeting goals are accomplished, a member needs to facilitate during Community meetings. Refer to the [“Facilitation Tip Sheet”](#) located in the Resources Section for additional information.
- **Relationship Management**—As new members join a CoP, it is important they feel welcome and have the opportunity to meet other members. To strengthen these relationships, it is important that a member be responsible for making introductions and connecting new and old members.
- **Subject Matter Expertise**—The CoP you launch is based on a PHIN technology or function. To begin conversations on this topic, it is important that related topics and hot button issues are identified, and experts who are able to contribute to the conversations are brought in for discussion. To gain more insight on this topic, please read the [“SME Tip Sheet”](#) located in the Resources Section.
- **Technology Management**—A crucial tool needed by a CoP is an easy-to-use, accessible communication vehicle. You may choose to begin using an e-mail distribution list, or you may choose to use a message board. A member will need to be responsible for identifying the tool(s) your group will use, ensuring members have access, and that the tools work as expected. Refer to the Resources Section [“Technology Management Tip Sheet”](#) for more information.
- **Communication Management**—It is important to identify a community member who will manage effective distribution of the CoP’s messages externally, seeking ways to promote and share the knowledge products of the Community.

<b>In Person</b>	Face-to-face meetings	
	Teleconferences Web conferences Online chat rooms	E-mail Listservs Message boards Wikis Blogs Podcasts
<b>Not In Person</b>	<b>Real Time</b>	<b>Not In Real Time</b>

### Select Collaboration Resources

Members of your CoP will likely span many organizations and geographic locations, and therefore it is imperative to have several tools in place enabling communication. Your Community of Practice will need to identify the tools that will best serve your group’s communication and collaboration needs. While PHIN is currently evaluating collaboration tool options and will share further information as it becomes available, it is critical to offer tools at the time of your CoP’s launch. To help you choose the tools that are right for your community, a feature comparison may be used (see the [“Technology Tool Comparison”](#)). You may wish to poll your members to identify any tools already in existence as it may be possible to borrow existing resources without incurring additional costs.

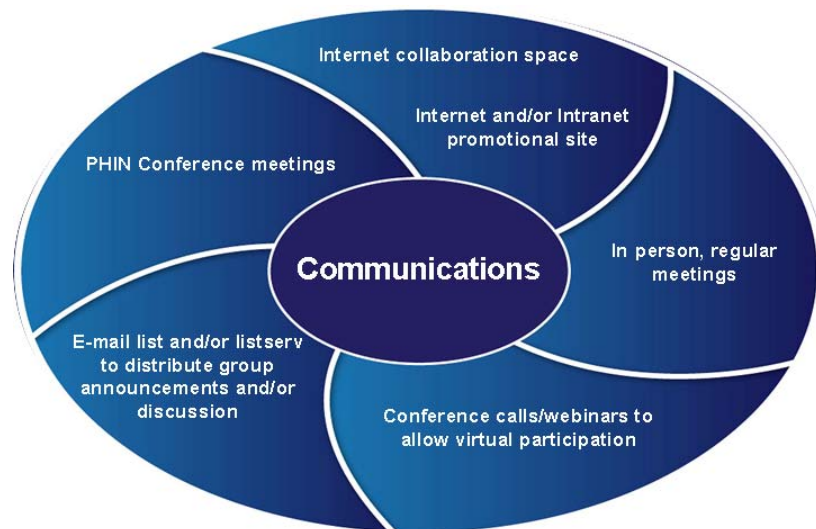
When considering collaboration resources, there are two factors that should be considered: geography and timeliness. The image to the left, adapted from *Leveraging Communities of Practice for Strategic Advantage* (p. 89), shows several communication tools available depending on the location of the participants and how fast a response is expected.<sup>6</sup>

The easiest type of communication is an in-person meeting. These take place face-to-face and participants have the opportunity to respond immediately. Unfortunately, with geographically dispersed communities, these meetings are expensive and difficult to schedule. While it is great to host these meetings for all members once or twice each year, a lack of resources may make it difficult to hold these in-person meetings on a more regular basis.

Another common communication vehicle takes place while people are geographically dispersed, yet connected at the same time. Examples of this include web conferences, teleconferences, instant messaging, and chat rooms. These interactions are scheduled for a specific day and time or are initiated by someone who can expect an immediate response.

These first two categories of communication are considered *synchronous* or “real-time” communication because they happen at the same time for all participants.

The final category of communication includes types of interaction during which someone can respond to a presentation, question, or statement at their leisure. This type of communication is considered *asynchronous* or not happening at the same time. E-mail, listservs, message boards, wikis, blogs, podcasts, and many types of social networking tools are based on this asynchronous concept. An author can post a blog today, and in 3 weeks, someone else can read that post and respond via comment or e-mail. These interactions do not happen at scheduled times—they depend on users to seek them out and respond if and when they choose.



All types of communication are important for encouraging collaboration within a CoP. For an explanation on how communication mediums impact community relationships, please refer to the Section, [Balance Events in Public and Private Spaces](#).

While a real time meeting or teleconference will allow your group to discuss relevant topics, it may not be possible for all members to attend at the same time. By using multiple tools, it is possible to include all members via several mediums. For instance, storing meeting minutes in a repository or posting follow-up questions on a message board can yield valuable input from members that missed an event or have something additional to add to the discussion.

### CoPC Support

As a PHIN CoP, your community has the benefit of becoming part of the Communities of Practice Council (CoPC). All PHIN CoPs have representatives that serve together as the governing body for the network of the PHIN Communities of Practice. To learn more about the support provided by CoPC, see the [Overview of PHIN Communities of Practice](#).

### Resources

This CoP Resource Kit has been developed by the PHIN CoPP and will be enhanced and expanded with PHIN Communities of Practice growth. Templates and guides are available at the end of each major Resource Kit section for use by all PHIN CoPs. If you have suggestions for additional resources that may be useful to your CoP and others, please provide those suggestions to via the online form.

The following table provides an overview of Resource, located in the [Resources Section](#) that may be helpful as you learn more about CoPs.

Related Resource	Description	Audience
<b>You Might Be A CoP If...</b>	If you're part of a group but are not sure if it is functioning as a Community of Practice, this quiz may help you decide.	Members of existing groups who might want to explore the possibility of the group becoming a Community of Practice (CoP) for the Public Health Information Network (PHIN).
<b>In What Phase is my CoP?</b>	The Community of Practice Resource Kit is for use by brand new CoPs as well as those who have several years of experience. This quiz will help you decide which sections of the Kit are most useful to your group. This quiz may also assist you in determining at which stage in the CoP lifecycle your community operates.	Leaders of existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>Could it be a CoP?</b>	Have an idea for a new CoP? These questions will help you vet the idea with your peers and make sure you're on the right track.	Individuals that would like to start a new PHIN Community of Practice (CoP)
<b>CoP Charter Template</b>  <b>CoP Charter Overview</b>	CoP charters, developed by each CoP, include mission, scope, objectives, and other course-setting components needed by the group. This template gives you some ideas for the type of information you might want to include in yours – with the expectation that the needs of your CoP, and therefore the charter, may change over time.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>Community Expectations</b>	It's important to provide guidelines to your members to ensure that they follow expectations that allow your CoP to thrive. This resource provides examples of general guidelines for participating in a CoP and specific guidelines for participating in a CoP meeting.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>Request For an Executive Sponsor</b>  <b>Request Brief</b>	As a new CoP it is important to retain a sponsor who can legitimize and support the community. This Template provides a mechanism for demonstrating the value of sponsoring a community of practice.  Microsoft PowerPoint – includes in-depth background slides Microsoft Word Brief– includes a brief overview of CoPs	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs) that are in need of an executive sponsor
<b>Facilitation Tip Sheet</b>	The facilitator is responsible for managing meetings, keeping conversations on track, and ensuring each member's voice is heard. This tip sheet gives some tips for how to accomplish these tasks. You can also reference the "Advanced Facilitation Guide" for an advanced guide to facilitation (suggested for experienced facilitators).	Leaders and members acting as PHIN Community of Practice (CoP) Facilitators

Related Resource	Description	Audience
<b>Advanced Facilitation Guide</b>	The facilitator is responsible for managing meetings, keeping conversations on track, and ensuring each member's voice is heard. This guide covers both basic and advanced tips for how to accomplish these tasks. You can also reference the Facilitation Tip Sheet for only the basic guidelines for facilitation (suggested for new or interim facilitators).	Leaders and members acting as PHIN Community of Practice (CoP) Facilitators
<b>SME Tip Sheet</b>	As a SME for your community, your responsibilities include inviting experts to speak to your CoP, bringing in new ideas, identifying topics for meeting agendas, and maintaining the CoP focus. This tip sheet gives some ideas for how to get all of this done.	Leaders and members acting as PHIN Community of Practice (CoP) Subject Matter Experts
<b>Technical Management Tip Sheet</b> <b>Technology Tool Comparison</b>	You're technically savvy, but for your CoP you also need to help identify the right tools for your group, define account permissions and roles, and help develop collaboration rules to ensure everyone acts respectfully. Read this Tip Sheet for some ideas on how this can work within your CoP.	Leaders and members acting as PHIN Community of Practice (CoP) Technical Managers

## Launch a Community of Practice

### Build Membership

Once CoP leaders and an initial set of documents defining the interest and mission of your community have been determined, it is time to begin the search for CoP members. It is imperative to start the process of solidly connecting members and to foster relationship building during the kickoff of your CoP while creating the energy needed for the community to successfully launch. Community leaders must share their knowledge and vision for the community with potential members. Leaders will need to invest time, networking skills, and technical knowledge to launch the Community of Practice.<sup>1</sup> The value of using social and business networks for recruiting members cannot be underestimated; leaders should remember to ask new members to help recruitment efforts by contacting potential members within their own networks. Establishing membership criteria may help community leadership ascertain a general profile of the membership base.<sup>12</sup> It may also be helpful to develop a process for prospective member identification as well as an invitation based upon the Resources below (all are located in the [Resources Section](#)).

- CoP Formation Announcement Template
- Invitation Approach with Script
- Meeting E-Mail Invitation Template
- Membership Tracking Template

Whatever the resources you choose to utilize, you should emphasize the benefits and value of participating in a CoP.

### Interview Potential Members

A useful approach in recruiting members to participate in your Community of Practice is to “interview” them. This process is not one that is used to screen out potential members, but an opportunity to discuss the community’s potential value to the individuals and to their organizations. The interview approach is a first discussion aimed at digging deeper into the potential member’s areas of interest and what he or she feels should be the priorities for the CoP. Additionally, an interview is an excellent way to identify and recruit future leaders as it may unveil skills you may not have otherwise recognized. Interviews are important in relationship building and may foster one-on-one bonds between members creating trust--a critical precursor to knowledge sharing and collaboration.<sup>1</sup> The [“Invitation Approach”](#) document located in the Resources Section may generate additional ideas around this topic.

### Invite Experts

While the desire to participate and contribute peer-to-peer is sufficient motivation for some members, involving key thought leaders and Subject Matter Experts in the CoP will lend value to your CoP and encourage participation of new membership.<sup>1</sup> Some members of a CoP will participate simply because they want to hear its primary thought leaders speak, or they are intrigued by the prospect of interacting and associating with experts on a collegial level. Of course, thought leaders and Subject Matter Experts who move from occasional presenters to fully engaged community members will contribute greatly to the practice of your community. When convinced of your CoP’s ability to contribute to the community, these experts can serve as community champions in circles outside the PHIN Community.

### Just Remember....

**Experts Do Matter!** Seeking out thought leaders and soliciting their opinions on “how to” go about the task at hand is another way to attract their membership. If there is a shortage of such experts among the membership, then invite subject matter experts to come and speak/participate on a transitory basis.

*“Knowledge is powerful when it is used. There are many knowledgeable people that don’t do anything with their knowledge. There are other knowledgeable people that know a lot about a variety of things and they have the creative ability to link random thoughts together to develop powerful ideas and solutions.”<sup>24</sup>*

## The Kickoff Meeting

When community members and a focused area of interest have been identified, it is now time to hold a meeting. The kickoff meeting should be the start of regularly scheduled meetings, which help to anchor the community. To create a sense of community and familiarity it is helpful to have the group meet in the same space for each meeting—both in person and electronically.

If you are not hosting a face-to-face meeting, or if others might participate remotely, be sure to coordinate technology needs and user access well in advance.

Agenda items for your first meeting might include:

- Charter/mission review
- Leadership selection
- Goal prioritization
- Determine objectives
- Ensure all members are “on the same page”

The kickoff meeting should be used to solidify the direction of the group. Your CoP membership will be comprised of diverse colleagues and peers with a desire to work more effectively, solve problems, invent solutions, and learn. It will be important to review the high-level goals and objectives of the CoP at the kickoff meeting.

During subsequent meetings, your CoP can begin to explore the issues of the domain. In order to kick off these conversations, you may find it helpful to do one or more of the following

- Present your work in the CoP or ask one of your initial members to share some challenges in a domain area, with time for Q&A;
- Distribute discussion material such as related articles or papers in advance;
- Identify a particular community-related topic / issue and ask members to come prepared to discuss;
- Send questions pertaining to the topic to attendees in advance; and,
- Base discussion around goals outlined in your charter.

Your facilitator plays a vital support role for your kickoff and subsequent meetings. Ensure that you have engaged a facilitator who can adequately encourage productive inquiry, manage tension, and work toward the development of a solution.<sup>1,6</sup> See the [“Facilitation Tip Sheet”](#) in the Resources Section for more information.

## Self Promotion

Once established, the community will want to share initial work and plans with others. CoPs may want to:

- Present challenges and accomplishments at the PHIN CoPC meetings;
- Create a CoP-focused newsletter for your CoP and share broadly (see [“Newsletter Template”](#) in the Resources Section);
- Develop a white paper or “issue brief” on a challenge and potential solution;
- Submit abstracts to conferences;
- Send articles to professional journals detailing the work of the community;
- Highlight activities and accomplishments via articles in journals and newsletters managed by national organizations and other public health partners; and,
- Post articles about your accomplishments on your organization’s intranet or website.

The following table provides an overview of Resource, located in the [Resources Section](#) that may be helpful as you learn more about CoPs.

Related Resource	Description	Audience
<b>Formation Announcement Template</b>	Your CoP has formed and now it's time to spread the word. This template offers some boilerplate text for your use.	Leaders of new PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>Invitation Approach</b>	After identifying people who might be interested in joining your CoP, you may want to reach out to them personally. This template offers dialogue and text ideas to get you started.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>E-mail Invitations</b>	If you'd like to reach out to potential members by sending them an email invitation to join your CoP, this template offers some general text as a starting point.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>Membership Tracking Template</b>	You'll want to track both the people you've invited to join your CoP as well as those who have joined. This template makes it easy to log all that information in one central location.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>Newsletter Template</b>	As your CoP begins maturing, you may want to develop a CoP newsletter for your domain. This template, in Microsoft Word, gives you a great start.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)



## Sustain and Evolve

### Encourage Ongoing Participation

In the Sustain and Evolve phase of CoP development it is important to consider strategies for maintaining and increasing membership, as well as achieving the goals of the Community. Unlike a work group or team, your members participate voluntarily; they have a passion for the subject matter and are interested in increasing their own understanding of the domain and contributing to innovation in the field.<sup>7</sup> You have the advantage of engaging active, enthusiastic members who are willing to seek and share knowledge as well as build trusting relationships with other people.

The challenge you face is to help members recognize their commitment to the domain and provide the infrastructure for members to share capabilities and build knowledge in a safe and rewarding forum.<sup>9</sup> To accomplish this task, you need to

- Provide new and seasoned members an easy means of participation;
- Ensure that the value of membership is clearly articulated; and,
- Create abundant opportunities for members to become engaged in the community.

### Make it Easy!

You have already identified passionate people who will voluntarily focus on building knowledge within your domain. It will be equally important to tend to ongoing membership needs. As a leader, you may help community members relate their participation in the CoP to professional and personal work goals. By defining a domain focus that has practical utility for individuals and organizations, you create a tangible, explicit value for potential members.<sup>10</sup>

Members may need to obtain permission or organizational support to participate in your Community of Practice. Benefits of CoPs to members, organizations, and the public health community are outlined in the [Introduction to Communities of Practice](#) section. While CoPs provide tremendous value through sharing experiences, promoting best and emerging practices, and providing a forum in which issues and problems can be raised and resolved.<sup>18</sup> It may be important to help members make a case to their managers to demonstrate that an *individual* who participates also has the potential to devise better solutions and make better decisions by

- Developing an enhanced professional identity;
- Networking with peers and increasing his/her visibility among those peers;
- Gaining access to Subject Matter Experts who may be able to help focus and articulate developing ideas; and,
- Participating in learning and development events and activities.

*Organizations* also benefit when their representatives participate in a CoP. When an organization allows its personnel to join, it is potentially increasing

- Employee efficiency, in terms of time and cost, in retrieving information and a reduced learning curve;
- Industry benchmarking capacity;
- Involvement in key industry and national initiatives; and,
- Organizational reputation as a contributor in building new capabilities.

### Just Remember....

#### Membership is Voluntary.

People will participate in a community of practice because they want to, not because they are made to. By seeking out passionate voluntary members, you'll ensure that you have enthusiastic participants who willingly seek and share information, which will produce greater results than if members had simply been assigned another task.

*"If participation is compulsory, it may become perfunctory."<sup>4</sup>*

## Just Remember....

**Make it Matter - Create Value for Potential Members.** New and potential members need to be excited about the domain-focus of the Community of Practice, but they also need to know that they will get a return on their investment. Work with potential members to help them determine not only what they can contribute, but also what they can expect in return.

*"Value is the key to community vitality. When members are clear about the value for themselves and others, they often become more active and committed." <sup>23</sup>*

While there are numerous benefits to be gained in CoP participation, it is not always easy for members to communicate these benefits to others. The ["Case for Participation Reflection Guide," "Case for Participation Brief,"](#) and ["Case for Participation Presentation,"](#) located in the Resources Section, are designed to allow potential members (individual or organizational) to identify mutual or shared goals with a domain CoP and the logistical practicality of participation. These resources also allow potential members to plot out an information-sharing plan.

In a distributed community where members come from diverse locations, agencies, and jurisdictions, the need to demonstrate the value of Community participation will be even greater.<sup>1</sup> Leaders and managers may not be directly involved in functional work performed by various employees and will most likely be concerned with ensuring the employees' work contributes to the organization's goals. However, if you can help potential members demonstrate how CoP activities relate to organizational goals, members

are more likely to successfully develop a case for participation. For example, consider Stanley, a potential member who is an epidemiologist with a county health department. Stanley has a professional interest in electronic messaging standards and would like to participate in the PHIN Public Health Vocabulary and Messaging CoP, but his supervisor is not "sold" on the idea. After all, won't this just be another series of meetings that puts more on Stanley's already full plate? Stanley can show his supervisor that participating in a community that develops HL7 standard messages for case reporting will contribute to the health department's mission by getting and keeping him up to speed on the vocabulary and messaging standards that will enable less ambiguity in data transmission and more efficient analysis. Stanley can develop his case by using the ["Case for Participation Reflection Guide,"](#) located in the Resources Section, then use a presentation template ([PowerPoint Template](#), [Brief Template](#)) to present the information to his manager.

When members are provided a resource that connects the interests of the community to individual, organizational, and public health priorities, they are able to highlight common interests and reconcile disparities that may exist.<sup>4</sup> By translating and connecting personal / professional strategic imperatives with the focus of the CoP, you provide the domain CoP a legitimacy that can be a foundation for building confidence and trust.<sup>9</sup>

## Provide Additional Motivations and Graduated Opportunities

CoP leadership responsibilities are described in [How to identify leaders in your CoP](#). However, leadership in a Community of Practice can evolve when members play various roles at different times. It is important for community growth that multiple individuals play several roles as the community coalesces and matures. Ask new members to take leadership in one or more of these roles to strengthen the core of the CoP and ensure proper development. Identify additional volunteer opportunities in order to broaden the scope and depth of membership.

## Develop Leadership—Share the Work

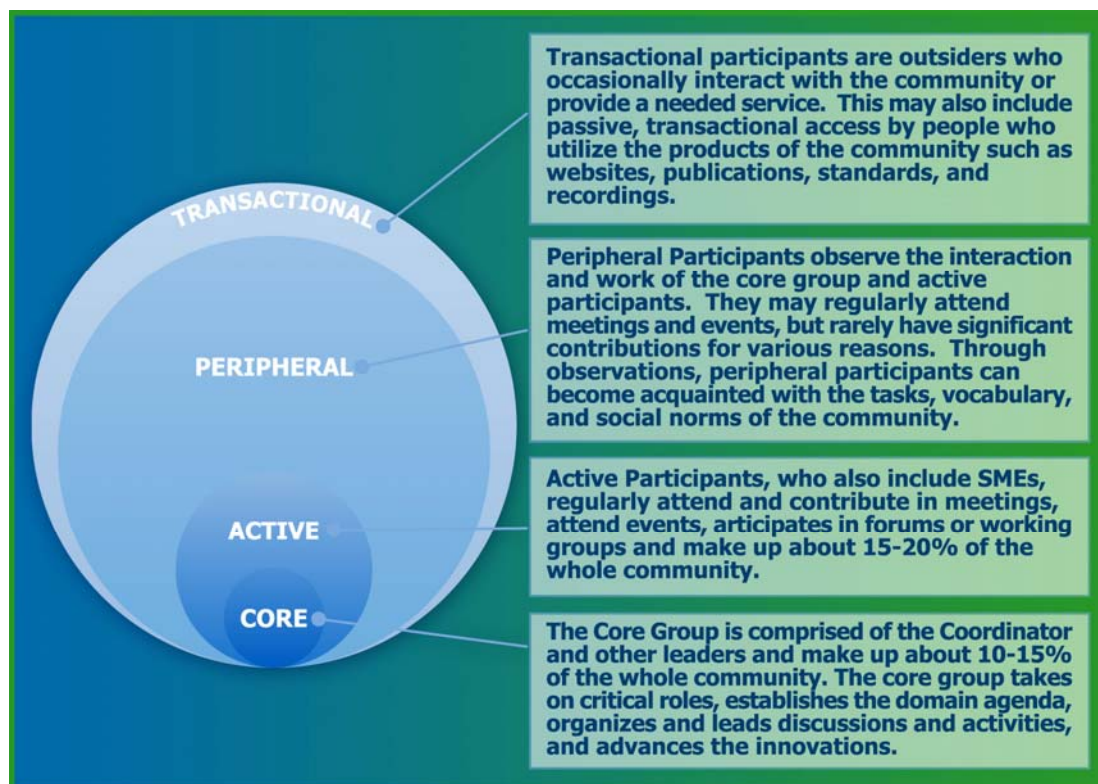
As your community continues to coalesce, leaders and active core members will need to determine the length of time members will serve in a role as well as the process for alternating roles. Once determined, the roles and responsibilities procedure should be formalized and added to the charter.

The topic [How to identify leaders in your CoP](#), reviews a list of community leadership responsibilities around facilitation, knowledge management, and additional areas. These responsibilities can be translated into specific roles or positions core members may want to assume in the community. In addition to the Community Leader, Community Sponsor, and Communities of Practice Council (CoPC) Representative there are six specific roles that your community may want to fill. One member can hold several roles, as is common in the early stages of a CoP's formation. And each role can be held by multiple CoP members, which may be needed as the community grows and is engaged in many activities. The following explains some common attributes of the people who best fit into these roles.

- **Knowledge Manager: Organizes a community's knowledge**—Sometimes known as Librarians, Knowledge Managers are detail-oriented, well organized, enjoy structuring content from disparate sources, and understand the technology resources employed by the Community. The person(s) in this role will work closely with Technical Specialists.
- **Facilitator: Handles the event management of the Community**—Manages meetings by ensuring that meeting agendas are followed, conversations stay on domain-related topics, and each member's voice is heard. For additional information and tips regarding facilitation, please refer to the ["Facilitation Tip Sheet"](#), located in the Resources Section.
- **People Connector: Assists community interaction**—also known as the community greeter, assists new members in connecting with current members and works to ensure new members feel comfortable expressing concerns and voicing suggestions.
- **Subject Matter Expert: Drives innovation as domain thought leader**—Known as the expert in the domain area and generally has many years of experience in the field, frequently publishes papers, speaks at conferences, and may teach related courses. For additional information, please refer to the ["SME Tip Sheet"](#), located in the Resources Section.
- **Technical Specialist: Manages the technology requirements and corresponding community tool**—Understands the technology used by the Community, assists in managing tools, training users as needed, and ensures the community adheres to the rules. For additional information, please refer to the ["Technical Management Tip Sheet"](#). Both resources are located in the Resources Section.
- **Communication Specialist: Manages the internal and external communication**—Skilled in written and oral communications, attention to detail, creative, and consistent.

### Recognize All Levels of Participation

Ideal community design takes into account the participation needed beyond leadership. Your community will have a core group of members, in addition to its leaders, who are actively engaged in most of the work of the community. You should also assume that many of your community members will be peripheral members and will not actively participate in much of the exchange that occurs. You might be prone to insist that everyone "actively" participate, but keep in mind that peripheral participants "are an essential dimension of communities of practice."<sup>11</sup> The figure below outlines the types of members you might see in your CoP.



Wenger, E. (2000). "Communities of Practice: Stewarding Knowledge." In C. Despres (Ed.) *Knowledge Horizons: the Present and the Promise of Knowledge*. Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd.

Even though member participation may wax and wane, you allow everyone to be recognized as full members by ensuring your CoP protects the opportunity for various levels of engagement. Fluid boundaries can also create opportunities for individuals to fulfill the right roles at the right time.<sup>10</sup>

### Just Remember....

**Choosing the right tools makes all the difference.** The methodology, technology, and tools you choose to host events and store your community's knowledge should be appropriate for your membership. Whatever you choose, ensure that your membership is already familiar and comfortable with the medium or ready to learn. Members should not have to grapple with unfamiliar technology to participate effectively.

*"When communities determine what they need to share and what forum will best enable them to share it, they can more readily own both the knowledge and forums for sharing it."*<sup>13</sup>

### Help Build Relationships

One of the most critical functions of CoP leadership is to enhance the connections, reciprocity, and trustworthiness between community members. This task is often performed by the People Connector who works to obtain a deeper knowledge of members and develop sensitivity to group dynamics that can hasten or hinder community building.<sup>5</sup> A People Connector should look for opportunities to link members to one another, make introductions and broker relationships.<sup>1</sup>

### Distributed Communities

Members located in different geographic locations, organizations, and jurisdictions present a special challenge for CoP leaders. While convening a CoP with a diverse makeup has a great potential for producing notable outcomes,<sup>20,22</sup> particular care should be taken when developing relationships between members. When community members can not rely on regular face-to-face interaction, participation in the community takes additional, intentional member effort.<sup>1</sup> In light of these challenges, the roles of Sponsor, Leader, Facilitator, and People Connector are all heightened.

Sponsors facilitate relationship building in a distributed community through approving community norms that may be inconsistent with norms of the sponsoring sector, organization, or unit. For instance, if the sponsoring agency is one that traditionally promotes *competition* between divisions or units, the CoP sponsor can promote *collaboration* as an expected community norm. CoP leaders then become increasingly responsible for supporting the community's cultural norms. With representation from different geographical locations and different sectors, you can assume that members will not have shared norms and values for interaction or working.<sup>1</sup> As participants from the private sector may be concerned with divulging proprietary information, participants from the government sector may not be accustomed to working with senior officials on a collegial level. Additionally, participants from different regional areas may have dissimilar methods of seeking and sharing information. When developing the CoP charter, it is important to clearly state the CoP's expectations around how knowledge will be shared and goals achieved. It is equally important to consistently convey these community values through socialization efforts for new members (See "[Mentor/Protégé Agreement](#)"), and you may want to make these expectations known in public forums where members interact. Clearly establishing and stating the CoP's norms and expectations at the outset may add a sense of stability, trust, and reciprocity to the community—particularly when these norms are maintained by leaders and community members through role-modeling and correction, where needed.<sup>21</sup>

### **Balance Events in Public and Private Spaces**

Because domain members will have differing levels of involvement, it's important to create a variety of forums where people can build and share knowledge. The ability to connect members through relationships will be at the heart of any community building that you do. Regular events in both the public and private space of a community are particularly essential in distributed communities. Building a visible community with rhythm and routine helps to keep members focused on the Community and allows them to develop trusting relationships through interaction and familiarity.<sup>1</sup>

- **Public Spaces** are open or visible to all and can include forums such as a face-to-face meeting, an online discussion group, or a blog, either in real time or not in real time. Public opportunities are critical in allowing members to gather, connect, explore ideas and concepts, and collectively solve problems. Public gatherings also create a platform for learning about the community, gauging Community culture, and getting to know many of the participating members.<sup>1</sup> Community participation in public spaces allows members to feel as though they are part of a joint enterprise and can be crucial in reinvigorating a community on a regular basis and creating benchmarks for the community's history. Public spaces are ideal for capturing and cataloging the community's documented, codified knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Through the use of public forums, members are more likely to connect in private spaces.<sup>1,8</sup> While public spaces are an essential part of CoPs, private spaces should not be ignored, particularly as the community is coalescing.<sup>12</sup>
- **Private spaces** are one-on-one or small group interactions that can occur face to face, by phone, or electronically, either in real time or not in real time. Private spaces not only allow members to share and problem solve one-on-one, but also strengthen the relationships between members.<sup>8</sup> Private or semiprivate dialogues allow members to bring up novel, peripheral, or partially formed issues and ideas they may not want to bring up in a public space. Then, the more mature, domain-specific issues can be addressed in a public space by the entire community and members will likely be able to contribute to problem solving.<sup>1</sup>



The graphic below highlights various types of public and private spaces as well as assorted features of each.



Adapted from: Snyder, William M., de Sousa Briggs, Xavier. "Communities of Practice: A New Tool for Government Managers." IMB Center for the Business of Government. 2003.

Forum Type	Public	Private	Features
Website, wikis, RSS feeds, podcasts	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captures information</li> <li>• Publishes for group to view</li> <li>• Easily accessible to group knowledge</li> <li>• Allows for passive and transitional education</li> </ul>
Listserv, blogs, social networking bookmarks	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers efficient information sharing</li> <li>• Unobtrusive Q&amp;A and peripheral learning</li> <li>• Can be private or public, based on user choice</li> </ul>
Site visits		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows members to develop personal relationships and build shared histories</li> <li>• Creates a foundation and context for problem solving</li> <li>• Provides opportunity to learn about site-specific challenges and opportunities</li> </ul>
Face-to-face events	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitates relationships</li> <li>• Builds trust among members</li> <li>• Creates a sense of joint enterprise</li> <li>• Can jump start work on a special topic</li> <li>• Provides opportunity for "private" connection</li> <li>• Increases productivity in other learning venues</li> </ul>
One on one—by phone, chat room, etc.		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows members to develop personal relationships and build trust</li> <li>• Facilitates deeper problem solving</li> <li>• Allows ideas to be vetted by other members before presenting to the whole group</li> </ul>
Tele/ video/ web conferences	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-cost option to increase interactivity and relationship building</li> <li>• Provides opportunity to address issues "on demand"</li> <li>• Reinforces cultural norms of CoP and allows members to get to know each other's "style"</li> </ul>

Forum Type	Public	Private	Features
Projects or subgroups		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build relationships and sense of joint enterprise</li> <li>• Address collective needs (e.g., developing universal applications) by tapping into individual interests or focus</li> </ul>

As a CoP leader, you are the gatekeeper of the interface between private and public interchanges. By thoughtfully managing private spaces and the resulting relationship building, you will enrich events and interactions in public spaces.<sup>1</sup>

### Create a Member Directory

A member directory is a simple, straightforward mechanism that allows new members to begin participation immediately, with ease, and without risk. To create a member directory, each member must create a basic profile that includes contact information, title and role(s), and areas of interest or expertise within the domain. When members expand their profile to include more in-depth professional characteristics, interests, values, and accomplishments, members have access to more insightful information that may serve as openings for casual conversation and subsequent relationship building.<sup>6</sup> Members should consider including individual photographs and links to personal or professional websites (keeping in mind that the content is for work-related use). Use the [“Biographical Sketch Template”](#), located in the Resources Section, as a template for creating a member directory. A member directory may be helpful in distributed communities where face-to-face interaction between members may be rare.

### Develop a Person-to-Person Activity

A Person-to-Person activity is a unique method for welcoming new members into the community and is intended to encourage members to establish a personal and professional relationship with one another and to set the stage for future collaboration within the group. In a Person-to-Person activity, a new member is usually paired with a current, experienced member who can share his or her experiences and the benefits gained from participation in a CoP. The experienced member may introduce the new member to the Community's social norms and help the new member become integrated into the community.

The People Connector may facilitate a Person-to-Person activity by pairing members and making introductions. Topics the paired members may discuss include their reasons for joining the CoP, current interest or work in the domain, involvement with PHIN, and anticipated and actual professional benefits of CoP membership.

### Facilitate Mentor/Protégé Relationships

A mentor is generally understood to be a knowledgeable individual who volunteers his or her time to guide another's development. A Mentor-Protégé program is meant to provide new members with

- A relational process for developing an understanding of member roles and responsibilities;
- A relationship with a seasoned member or leader who knows and understands the community's culture and norms and how to navigate within the structure of the community; and,
- A relationship that can assist the mentor and the protégé to develop additional professional relationships within and outside the community.

The mentor helps a protégé to:

- Create a vision for what may be accomplished through the community;
- Clarify and set goals;
- Shift perspectives to new possibilities;
- Develop new action strategies;
- Remain accountable; and,



- Draw upon the mentor's existing experience and knowledge.

To facilitate a mentor/protégé program for your Community of Practice

- Develop a list of available mentors and ensure you will be able to sufficiently meet the anticipated demand;
- Create a set of loosely defined responsibilities for mentors and protégés. Allow mentors and protégés to take these suggestions and negotiate the activities and terms in ways that best work for them;
- Solicit volunteers interested in cultivating a mentor / protégé relationship;
- Pair mentors and protégés based on professional goals, experience within the community, and availability; and,
- Offer the ["Mentor-Protégé Agreement"](#) resource to pairings to assist in plan development.

The ["Mentor-Protégé Agreement"](#), located in the Resources Section, provides guidance on items the mentor and protégé may want to negotiate, such as activities and the length of the anticipated commitment. Responsibilities for both mentor and protégé may vary from one experience to the next and may change as the protégé's abilities and goals evolve. The primary purpose of a mentor/protégé program is to overcome barriers, build relationships, and create opportunities for community members. If the program becomes burdensome for either participant, adjustments may be made accordingly.

## Community Evolution

As your CoP matures, it will continue to need attention as it begins to refine its focus and expand its priorities during the maturation stage. New members may quickly become active and veteran members may transition to peripheral roles or completely out of the community. While growth often leads to tremendous opportunities, it must be managed in order to translate these opportunities into innovation.<sup>1</sup>

Several activities to prepare for during this phase include

- Involving experts in the activities of the community;
- Continuing to recruit new members while not losing focus on the goals of the community; and,
- Transitioning from sharing knowledge to developing a body of knowledge.

A maturing community may greatly benefit from the contributions of experts and efforts should be made to engage them and utilize their knowledge. Experts can become more fully engaged by being asked to respond to the following questions

- What are your thoughts on this matter?
- How would you approach this?
- Do you think this is the correct way to proceed?
- What has your past experience shown you on this topic?
- How do you think this project can proceed most effectively?

## Just Remember....

**Boundaries Were Meant to be Challenged.** The PHIN Communities of Practice is designed to be a collection of communities that finds value in crossing and spanning boundaries. While it is important to understand where your work begins and another's ends, in connecting with community members you may find a much needed opportunity for growth and development that keeps your CoP truly cutting-edge.

*"....Boundary crossing can be the source of a deep kind of learning. While the core of a practice is a locus of expertise, radically new insights and developments often arise at the boundaries between communities. Something very creative can take place in the meeting of perspectives at these boundaries when participants make a genuine effort to listen to each other or to solve a common problem."*<sup>1</sup>

You should find a balance between welcoming new members and focusing on established issues or cutting-edge topics and expert interactions. It is important to recognize that growth can multiply relationships and make the community more satisfying and robust. New members can offer new perspectives and different life and work experiences.<sup>1</sup>

At this stage of development, you have determined your community's value and are clarifying its focus and further defining its role in the field. Be aware that boundaries may begin to shift and communities may appropriately begin to interface with other CoPs. Movement from sharing information to developing a body of knowledge will increase the number and types of demands on the members of the community.<sup>1</sup>

In creating this body of knowledge, it is important for Community members to:

- Strive for quality at the individual level;
- Take pride in and responsibility for the work that they produce; and,
- Use defined and disciplined modifiable processes to produce high-quality work on planned schedules.

### Just Remember....

**Tell Your Stories.** Outcome evaluation is critical in your evaluation approach as a part of documentation and demonstrating the value of your community. But don't forget the importance of anecdotal information from key informants for a real and complete sense of the total value of your community, including the role of social capital and how relationships produce results.

*"Stories are the best way to traverse the knowledge system in a way that explains the linkages between community activities, knowledge resources, and performance outcomes. Only a story can describe the complex causal relations while incorporating implicit contextual factors that may be crucial to appreciate, but hard to codify or generalize." <sup>1</sup>*

As the community evolves it is important that core members continue to monitor the progress of the CoP and not allow it to stagnate or lose sight of its purpose.

### Explore Boundaries

As a means of maintaining vitality and enhancing the work of the CoP, a mature CoP may take opportunities for collaboration, which may occur among members, across organizations, or among multiple CoPs. These collaborations may be fostered by

- Asking members to share about domain-specific information from other organizations to which they belong;
- Actively participating in PHIN discussion groups to discover areas of collaboration; and,
- Attending meetings, conferences, or events with professionals interested in your CoP's focus area.

### Develop a Learning Agenda

The Community of Practice leadership responsibilities include collaborating with the PHIN Community

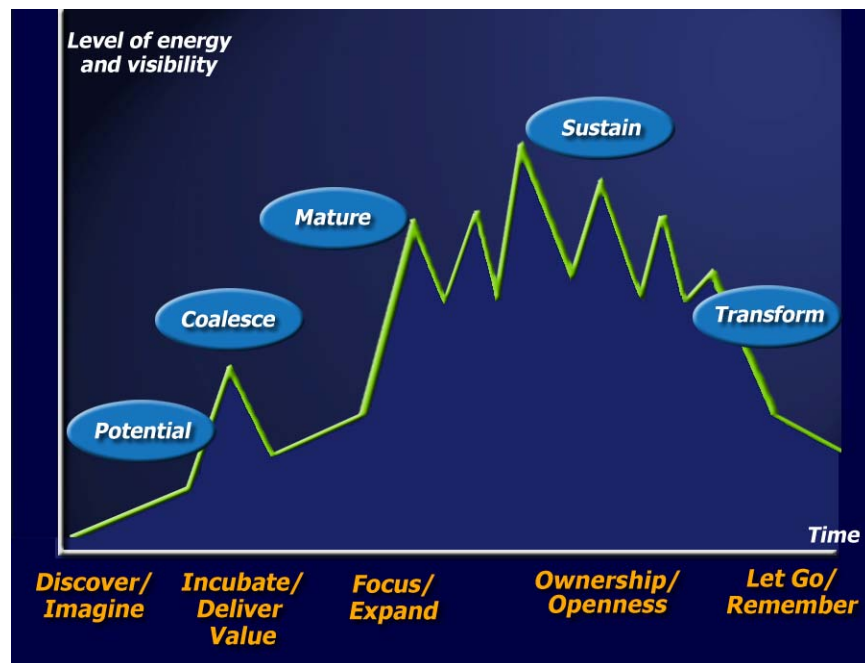
partners to develop and implement a learning agenda. Your CoP Charter, which can be used to outline this agenda, is a living document designed to guide decision making in order to promote an integrated and comprehensive learning plan for the Community. The intent of implementing a learning agenda is to enhance efforts, combine planning, and take steps to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the community. To begin creating a learning agenda, consider the following

- Host a brainstorming session for Community members to discuss the domain-related topics they would like to learn more about;
- Assign identified topics to individuals (or small teams);
- Ask each topic owner to research and distribute information on their category; and,
- Request all members review materials prior to the next meeting.

## A Time for Change

It is important to understand the communities of practice life-cycle and its five phases: Potential, Coalesce, Mature, Sustain, and Transform.

In the *Potential* phase, a problem or project is identified that would best be solved jointly by colleagues from different departments, parts of an organization, or perhaps different organizations. This is a time of imagination and discovery as the ground work is laid for formation of a new CoP. Members discover commonalities and find one another at this time.<sup>1,2</sup> Once the group has formed and the kickoff meeting has occurred, the work of the community will be further refined.



During the *Coalescing* phase, new ideas incubate and the value that the CoP will offer to PHIN is further defined. This is a vital time for group members to come together for a common goal and understanding of the true nature of the work of the CoP.<sup>1,2</sup>

## Just Remember....

**Judiciously Document.** In order to create a shared history and communicate your community's collective knowledge accumulated over time, the importance of good documentation cannot be overstated. Adequate documentation is judicious and selective by nature. Develop a reasonable system to capture your community's process and products, but do not create a sea of documents through which no one can navigate.

*"The result of documentism is typically an information junkyard, stockpiled with potentially useful but inaccessible information. It is a consequence of thinking that the documents are the main source of value of the community. To remedy it, communities need to think through their purpose, identify the documents that would genuinely be useful, and develop clear roles for managing them."*<sup>1</sup>

In the *Maturation* phase, the work of the group is undertaken in earnest, the focus of the group is further defined, and the membership is expanded to include new members with the expertise and interest to do the work of the CoP. Members engage in developing a practice and joint activities. Artifacts such as a knowledge repository made up of edited notes on community meetings, data bases, relevant articles, books, cases and other resources are created during this phase.<sup>1,2</sup> Roles may change during the maturation phase as old members transition out of the community and new members join the effort. Maintaining and expanding focus are key elements of this phase.

The level of energy and the vitality of the CoP are greatest during the *Sustaining* phase. The work of the community will be well underway and set milestones will be realized. CoP members will adopt an attitude of openness toward the work of the community and assume ownership for the tasks and projects underway.

During the *Transformation* phase, the CoP experiences major shifts in its organization and focus. One CoP may break apart and reorganize. Another CoP may undergo a split or merge with another CoP. During transformation, the primary

objectives and goals that formed the CoP have been achieved and members may begin to let go and start to remember where the group has been and what has been accomplished.<sup>1,2</sup> A CoP might find there are different interests represented and choose to diversify those interests into new and separate CoPs, or may choose to align with another CoP with similar interests. Occasionally, when the work of a CoP has been achieved the group is dissolved. This is a very normal part of the CoP lifecycle.

### Define the Community's Role in the Organization

As your CoP matures, it will take on greater importance within PHIN and must be clear about what responsibilities it is able to assume. Realistic timelines should be developed for the work of the community and the achievement of milestones should be acknowledged and celebrated. A member of the CoP will also represent the group to the CoPC and will report on progress to that group.

### CoP Working Groups

Maturing communities may find it useful to form working groups so members are able to remain connected to the CoP as a whole while doing work within a smaller group. A working group is usually organized for a special purpose, is self-managed, and may be comprised of Subject Matter Experts in a particular area. It is often through working groups that experts in a particular discipline can participate more fully.

It is important as workgroups form that they do not lose connection to the CoP. Your community's learning agenda is fluid and subject to change with members' needs. Various ways this change may be managed is through exploring new topic areas, creating guidelines, and identifying several approaches to practice.<sup>1</sup> As change takes place, projects will become developmental milestones to the life of the CoP.

### Maintain Momentum

A significant challenge faced by evolving communities is the ability to sustain momentum. There tend to be natural shifts in the CoP's practice, members, technology, and relationship to the PHIN Community as the CoP develops. When key members are unavailable, less active members must step in and assume greater responsibility to maintain momentum. For this to occur, it may be necessary to attract new people to the core group. Over time, the community must take steps to maintain energy and may want to implement these strategies to rejuvenate the community

- Host a renewal workshop;
- Review documents and materials from the CoP's early existence;
- Target new members from groups that do not yet have strong representation; and,
- Invite guest speakers or lecturers to talk about their work or innovations in a particular field<sup>1</sup>.

The following table provides an overview of resources that may help you with increasing and maintaining momentum within your CoP. Each Resource described is located in the [Resources Section](#).

Related Resource	Description	Audience
<b>Case for Participation Reflection Guide</b>	Members may need to obtain permission or organizational support to participate in a CoP. By sharing this completed document, potential members can identify mutual or shared goals with the CoP and determine how practical it is for them to participate. This customizable Template, in Microsoft Word, also allows potential members to create a plan for obtaining support from their managers and sharing information about the CoP.	Individuals who are interested in joining a PHIN Community of Practice (CoP) and want to justify and explain their involvement in the CoP to their managers and peers
<b>The Case For Participation</b>	This customizable Template, in Microsoft PowerPoint, allows potential members to share information about the CoP as part of their plan to obtain support from their managers.	Individuals who are interested in joining a Community of Practice

Related Resource	Description	Audience
<b>Case for Participation Brief</b>	Microsoft PowerPoint – includes in-depth background slides Microsoft Word Brief– includes a brief overview of CoPs	(CoP) and want to explain the concept to their peers or request permission to participate from their managers
<b>Biographical Sketch Template</b>	To help your CoP members get to know one another, you can ask each person to share some information about their personal and professional interests. This resource provides the framework for that sharing.	Members of PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs) who would like to provide a brief biography of themselves to their community
<b>Mentor-Protégé Agreement</b>	If you set up a Mentor-Protégé program, it may be helpful to give participants some guidelines for coming up with an agreement. This resource may also be used by community members who want to enter into a mentor/protégé relationship on their own. This customizable Template can be used to ensure that participants are considering concrete action items when making their arrangement.	Members of PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs) who are interested in forming a Mentor/Protégé relationship as either Mentor or Protégé

## Evaluate

Mention “evaluation” to most people and reactions range from puzzlement to outright fear and disdain. However, once you gain an understanding of the basics of evaluation and how to use it, you will realize

that it is a valuable tool that can provide you with critical information about your CoP.

For excellent sources of information on evaluation, check out these sites:

- [CDC Evaluation Working Group](#)
- [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#)
- [University of Wisconsin – Program Development and Evaluation](#)
- [Western Michigan University – The Evaluation Center](#)

Evaluation is an integral part of the PHIN Communities of Practice Program. It is important to begin thinking about evaluation as you launch your CoP, for it will guide activities and focus throughout the life of a CoP. Evaluation enables members to think through various options, plan direction, and define processes and outcomes. This Resource Kit provides a basic review of evaluation, explains how evaluation will be conducted within the PHIN CoPs, and provides templates to get you started.

### What is Evaluation and Why is it Important?

Effective program evaluation is a systematic way to improve and account for activities conducted by the PHIN CoPs. Evaluation is used widely in many public health settings, and it can be applied easily to communities of practice. As concerns regarding the cost and effectiveness of public health informatics activities continue to grow, evaluation can be a powerful tool to inform decision-making and build support for continued funding.

Evaluation is a critical component of the PHIN Community and PHIN CoPs. As part of the participatory process of CoPs, all PHIN members are active players in both levels of the evaluation, which are described below.

#### Why Should We Evaluate?

- Find out “what works” and “what does not work”
- Conduct self-assessment and inform decision-making
- Improve partners’ capacity to conduct effective public health practice
- Showcase the effectiveness of each CoP to the PHIN Community
- Further the practice of public health informatics

### Evaluation Level 1: PHIN Community Evaluation

CDC will conduct ongoing evaluations of the PHIN Community and the relationship to PHIN CoPs. This will help in determining how well the CoP approach is working, as well as the overall impact on PHIN. Since the use of CoPs is a new approach to improve the implementation of PHIN, information collected through evaluation will assist CDC in assessing how well the PHIN CoPs accomplish their goals.

### Evaluation Level 2: CoP Evaluations

CDC developed a core set of questions to gather consistent information across all PHIN CoPs. The [“Core Evaluation Template”](#) contains the core questions that will inform this evaluation. In addition to the core questions, members of each CoP are expected to develop their own questions that address issues specific to their CoP. Staff at CDC are available to assist with this process.

### How Do I Participate in the PHIN CoP Evaluation?

There are three ways you can participate in evaluation activities

1. Complete the CDC PHIN CoP evaluation at the annual PHIN conference and any mid-year meetings that may be scheduled;
2. Take an active role in developing the evaluation of your PHIN CoP; and,
3. Participate in additional activities, such as focus groups, to gather information related to a specific evaluation question.



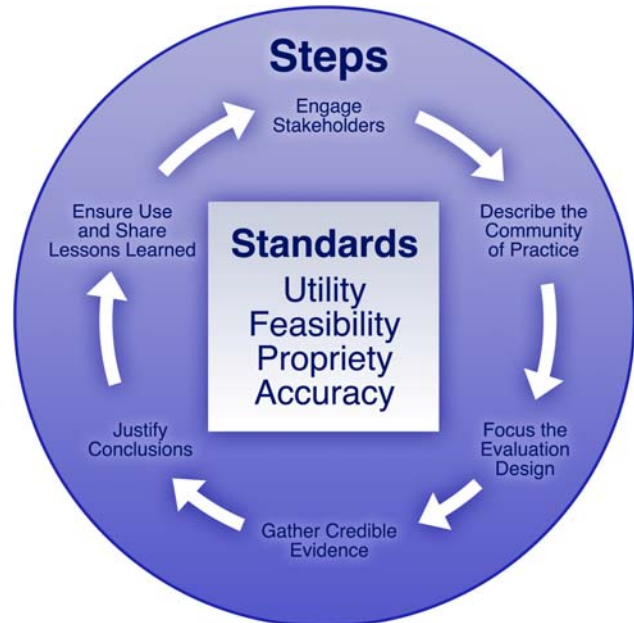
## How Do I Get my CoP Evaluation Started?

CDC's Evaluation Framework illustrated in the graphic, is a concise, thorough approach that can be easily understood and applied. The framework, which has been adapted for use with PHIN, emphasizes six logical steps and can be used as a starting point for PHIN CoPs evaluation.

Each of the six steps is described in detail below.

### 1. Engage Stakeholders

The evaluation cycle begins by engaging stakeholders (i.e., the persons or organizations having an investment in what will be learned from an evaluation and what will be done with the knowledge). Public health work, including PHIN CoPs, involves partnerships; therefore, any assessment of a public health program requires considering the value systems of the partners. Stakeholders should be engaged in a way that ensures their perspectives can be voiced and understood. When stakeholders are not engaged in this way, evaluation findings might be ignored, criticized, or resisted because they do not address the stakeholders' questions or values. After becoming involved, stakeholders help to execute the remaining steps.



Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/whatsnew.htm>

### 2. Describe the Community

Community descriptions convey the mission and objectives of the CoP being evaluated. Descriptions should be sufficiently detailed to ensure understanding of the CoP's goals and strategies. The description should discuss the CoP's capacity to effect change, its stage of development, and how it fits into the larger PHIN Community. CoP descriptions set the frame of reference for all subsequent decisions in an evaluation. The description enables comparisons with similar CoPs and facilitates attempts to connect community components to their effects. Moreover, stakeholders may have differing ideas regarding CoP goals and purpose. Evaluations done without agreement on the community definition are likely to be of limited use. Sometimes, negotiating with stakeholders to formulate a clear and logical description will bring benefits before data are available to evaluate CoP effectiveness.

### 3. Focus the Evaluation Design

The direction and process of the evaluation must be focused to assess the issues of greatest concern to stakeholders, while using time and resources as efficiently as possible. Not all design options are equally well-suited to meeting the information needs of stakeholders. After data collection begins, changing procedures might be difficult or impossible, even if better methods become obvious. A thorough plan anticipates intended uses and creates an evaluation strategy with the greatest chance of being useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate.

### 4. Gather Credible Evidence

Persons involved in an evaluation should strive to collect information that will convey a well-rounded picture of the CoP and be seen as credible by the evaluation's intended audience. Information (i.e., evidence) should be perceived by stakeholders as believable and relevant for answering their questions. Such decisions depend on the evaluation questions being posed and the motives for asking them. Credible evidence strengthens evaluation conclusions and the recommendations that follow.



### Assess the Quality of your Evaluation Activities

- **Utility:** Does the evaluation serve the information needs of intended users?
- **Feasibility:** Is the evaluation realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal?
- **Propriety:** Has the evaluation been conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results?
- **Accuracy:** Will the evaluation reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the CoP being evaluated?

### 5. Justify Conclusions

Evaluation conclusions are justified when linked to the evidence gathered and judged against agreed-upon values or standards set by the stakeholders. Stakeholders must agree that conclusions are justified before they will use the evaluation results with confidence.

### 6. Ensure Use and Share Lessons Learned

Lessons learned during the evaluation should automatically translate into informed decision-making and appropriate action. To make sure the evaluation findings are used correctly, deliberate effort is needed to ensure the evaluation processes and findings are disseminated and interpreted appropriately. Preparing for use involves strategic thinking and continued vigilance of the changing environment, both of which begin in the earliest stages of stakeholder engagement and continue throughout the evaluation.

### Moving Along with the Evaluation

Once you understand the basic concepts of evaluation, there are several additional activities that can be completed to target the evaluation to the needs of your Community.

1. First, assess the state of the field that your CoP addresses. A SWOT analysis (defined below) can help you define what currently exists, what is needed, and where the CoP can target its activities.
2. Utilize the information collected in the assessment to develop the goals and SMART objectives (defined below) of your CoP. Specific questions related to the work conducted within the CoP can then be added to the core evaluation template.
3. Finally, the ideas, products, and innovations that are generated by your CoP can be monitored by the ["Innovation Tracking Tool"](#) as they are disseminated within the PHIN community and beyond.

### SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis is a method used to evaluate the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats that exist in the area in which the CoP functions. In this context, it is used to assess the environment in which the CoP functions as well as resources and needs that add to the picture. SWOT analysis uses both internal and external factors that may impact the CoP. Internal factors, including strengths and weaknesses, reside within the CoP and its members, while external factors, opportunities and threats, are external to the CoP. Once these critical factors are identified, they are used to create the goals that members of your CoP would like to achieve.

The ["SWOT Analysis Template"](#) can guide you through the steps needed to identify internal and external factors that may influence your decision-making. In addition, the PHIN CoP Program will provide support to CoPs when completing the SWOT analysis.

### SWOT Analysis

- **Strengths:** *internal* attributes of the CoP's targeted area that currently exist that can facilitate activities
- **Weaknesses:** *internal* areas that need to be addressed in the targeted area
- **Opportunities:** *external* conditions that may facilitate activities of the CoP
- **Threats:** *external* conditions that may stand in the way of CoP activities

## SMART Objectives

Once you have created the goals of your CoP, it is time to think about objectives and activities needed to accomplish these goals. First, ask yourself the following questions:

- **WHAT** are we going to do?
- **WHY** is it important for us to accomplish this activity?
- **WHO** is going to be responsible for the activities?
- **WHEN** do we want this to be completed?
- **HOW** are we going to do these activities?

Once you have answered the questions listed above, define your SMART objectives to move those ideas into action. SMART objectives are:

- **Specific:** Concrete, detailed, and well defined so that you know where you are going and what to expect when you arrive;
- **Measurable:** Numbers and quantities provide means of measurement and comparison;
- **Achievable:** feasible and easy to put into action;
- **Realistic:** Considers constraints such as resources, personnel, cost, and time frame; and,
- **Time-Bound:** A time frame helps to set boundaries around the objective.

The following table lists questions for each SMART objective that will help your CoP translate objectives into SMART ones.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Time-Bound
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What exactly are we going to do in this CoP?</li><li>• What strategies will we use?</li><li>• Is the objective clear?</li><li>• Is the objective described with strong action verbs such as conduct, develop, build, plan, or execute?</li><li>• Who will be involved?</li><li>• What needs to make it happen?</li><li>• Is the outcome specified?</li><li>• Will this objective lead to the desired results?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will we know that change has occurred?</li><li>• Are we able to gather these measurements?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can it be done in the proposed timeframe?</li><li>• Are the limitations and constraints understood?</li><li>• Can we do this objective with the resources available to the CoP?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do we have the resources available to achieve this objective?</li><li>• Is it possible to achieve this objective?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When will this objective be accomplished?</li><li>• What is the stated deadline?</li></ul>

The [“SMART Objectives Template”](#) can guide you through the steps needed to define goals and SMART objectives.

## Core Evaluation

As a component of the evaluation of PHIN CoPs, a core set of evaluation questions will be gathered across all communities. These core questions cannot be changed unless the change is applied to the evaluation of all CoPs. The core questions will allow CDC to assess how each CoP is evolving, compare characteristics across different CoPs, and track changes over time. In addition to the core questions, members of each CoP are strongly encouraged to develop a set of evaluation questions that are specific to their community. CDC evaluation staff is available to assist with this process. The [“Core Evaluation](#)

[Template](#)” provides the questions and allows for additional questions that are unique to your CoP is included in the Kit.

### **Innovation Tracking**

The CoP environment should prove to be a fertile one that generates new ideas and products, improves existing ones, and disseminates what is learned to improve the practice of public health informatics. The [“Innovation Tracking Tool”](#) is provided for tracking products, ideas, and innovations as part of the overall CDC evaluation.

**CAVEAT:** High-quality evaluation requires time and effort from the beginning of the process through the justification and sharing of conclusions. Evaluation of each CoP has been designed to relieve CoP members of burden while maximizing individual input into the process. The evaluation section of this toolkit presents the basic concepts of evaluation and provides tools to participate in the process. Feel free to take a closer look at evaluation and give your input into developing an evaluation for your community.

The following table provides an overview of resources that may help you with preparing and conducting an evaluation. Each Resource described below is located in the [Resources Section](#).

Related Resource	Description	Audience
<b>SWOT Analysis Tool</b>	A SWOT analysis will help you identify internal and external factors in the environment (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) that can help with the development of your CoP's goals and objectives.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>SMART Objectives Template</b>	When it comes time to define the goals and objectives of your CoP, this template will walk you through the process of developing specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based objectives.	Leaders of new and existing CoPs
<b>Core Evaluation Template</b>	This template helps you start-off your evaluation process by aligning it with the standard evaluation for all PHIN CoPs. The template contains core questions that gather the same information across all PHIN CoPs. Each CoP can then modify the template by adding additional questions that are specific to its goals and objects.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
<b>Innovation Tracking Tool</b>	Creation and dissemination of new products and ideas are important outcomes of CoP collaborations. This template provides a means to record and track innovations that come from PHIN CoPs.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)

## Glossary

**Blog** — Website, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video.

**Chat Room** — Online-based, sometimes moderated communications taking place in real time.

**CoCHIS** — CDC's Coordinating Center for Health Information Services; NCPHI is one of the 3 Centers falling organizationally within CoCHIS.

**Community** — Group of people who come together to interact, discuss, share ideas, and collaborate.

**Community of Practice** — Group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis.

**Communities of Practice Program (CoPP)** — Group comprised of CDC/NCPHI federal employees and contractors charged with supporting and guiding the activities of the PHIN Community and PHIN CoPs.

**Domain** — Shared interest that provides the incentive and passion for the community to come together.

**Enterprise Architecture Community of Practice (EA CoP)** — The EA CoP brings together enterprise architects to work collaboratively with the programmatic, informatics and IT communities to share ideas, find solutions, and build upon the foundation of enterprise architecture. This EA CoP seeks to increase the use of enterprise architecture in the decision making processes within PHIN while facilitating the introduction of best practices.

**Governance Document** — Document that will outline the processes, procedures, accountability, and responsibilities of the PHIN Communities of Practice Council (CoPC), each Community of Practice, the PHIN Community and the Community of Practice Program. It is a working document, meant to change over time, and is currently in development by members of the CoPC. Once the governance document is established, there will be a standard practice for updating and modifying it to suit the PHIN CoPs needs.

**Information Links Collaborative Project (InfoLinks CoP)** — The InfoLinks CoP builds, improves and promotes Health Information Exchanges (HIEs) within public health systems. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) funded community of practice with over 21 state, local, territorial, and other public health members is supported by both CDC and the Public Health Informatics Institute (PHII).

**Electronic Laboratory Reporting Community of Practice (ELR CoP)** — The Electronic Laboratory Reporting Community of Practice (ELR CoP) brings together PHIN stakeholders nationwide involved in defining, implementing, maintaining, evaluating, and evolving electronic lab reporting. This community collaboratively develops knowledge, innovation, and best practices through discussion of current obstacles in ELR and sharing lessons learned to facilitate the modernization of public health surveillance. Additional areas to be considered for inclusion in the scope of the CoP include messaging for lab orders and specimen tracking.

**Message Board** — Internet forum for holding discussions and posting user-generated content.

**NCPHI** — CDC's National Center for Public Health Informatics.

**Outbreak Management Community of Practice (OM CoP)** — OM CoP promotes collaboration among all outbreak management practitioners including CDC program staff, local outbreak investigators,

and emergency operations personnel to increase the understanding and capabilities of managing outbreaks.

**PHIN Communities of Practice Council (CoPC)** — Structured group comprised of members from the PHIN Community and members from each of the five PHIN CoPs, the CoPP leader and CoPP members. This group functions in an advisory and guidance capacity, and is responsible for: suggesting priorities, funding amounts /mechanisms, and programmatic improvements to the CoPP, as well as identifying cross collaborations among communities.

**Podcast** — Multimedia file (audio or video) developed to be played back on a digital media player (an MP3 player) or a personal computer.

**Practice** — Community's mission that involves the development and shared practice of new technology, best practices, and gaining knowledge to address recurring problems.

**Public Health Information Network (PHIN)** — Community comprised of people, processes, and tools to strengthen the public health's capability to exchange information electronically. For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/phn](http://www.cdc.gov/phn).

**Public Health Information Network Community (PHIN Community)** — Community comprised of persons working to improve and strengthen PHIN,

**Public Health Information Network Community of Practice (PHIN CoP)** — Community of practice comprised of persons with the interest and passion to work in one functional or technical area key to PHIN.

**Public Health Vocabulary Community of Practice (PHVCoP)** — PHVCoP facilitates dialogue and problem solving around vocabulary development, standards usage, and distribution within public health.

**SMART Objective** — SMART objective is one that is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound.

**Wiki** — Collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language like HTML.

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## Note

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